DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 214 PS 005 783

AUTHOR	Saunders, Minta M.; Keister, Mary Elizabeth
TITLE	Nurturing Creativity: The Role of Living Space in the First Years of Life.
INSTITUTION	North Carolina Univ., Greensboro. Inst. for Child and Family Development.
PUB DATE	69
NOTE	8p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Development; Childhood Interests; Costs; *Creative Development; Early Experience; *Environmental Influences; Environmental Research; *Physical Environment; Preschool Children; Program Proposals; *Research Proposals
IDENTIFIERS	University of North Carolina

ABSTRACT

This proposal suggests researching the possibilities of offering experiences with surroundings--space, forms, colors, and materials--to many children at any early age. The design for such a setting would provide children with the unique advantage of developing within themselves a sympathy for basic forms, natural materials, and primary colors and demonstrate a total environment for very young children, with an indoor-outdoor living space to enhance their natural curiosity, exploratory needs, sensory perceptions, and creative-imaginative abilities. The need to research what constitutes an appropriate, enriching, and creative physical environment for the very young is emphasized, as well as demonstrating that the cost for such a setting would not be prohibitive. The research and design required would come within the full scope of the graduate program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (JS)

ED 066214

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

NURTURING CREATIVITY: THE ROLE OF LIVING SPACE IN THE FIRST YEARS OF LIFE

PROPOSAL FOR A RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Prepared by:

Minta M. Saunders

Mary Elizabeth Keister

THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

GREENSBORO

27412

PS 005783

1969

NURTURING CREATIVITY: THE ROLE OF LIVING SPACE

IN THE FIRST YEARS OF LIFE

Introduction

The quality of our man-made environment greatly depends on the quality of our creativeness in shaping it. An individual's experiences with his surroundings--space, forms, colors, materials--bear directly on his development, interests and abilities. The face validity of such a statement may be shown by reference to early experiences in the lives of artists, writers, architects.

Frank Lloyd Wright's exposure to a set of Froebelian "gifts" (a collection of kindergarten toys) in very early childhood is said to have played a crucial role influencing the uniqueness of his design. Of the impact this learning had in his childhood, Wright says in his autobiography:

> *The strips of colored paper, glazed, and "matt," remarkably soft, brilliant colors! Now came the geometric by-play of these charming checkered color combinations! The structural figures to be made with peas and small straight sticks; slender con-constructions, the joinings accented by the little green pea-globes. The smooth shapely maple blocks with which to build, the sense of which never afterward leaves the fingers: so <u>form</u> became <u>feeling</u>. . . . And the exciting cardboard shapes with pure scarlet face--such scarlet! Smooth triangular shapes, with white-back, and edges, cut in rhomboids, with which to make designs on the flat table top. What shapes they made naturally if only you would let them! . . . That early kindergarten experience with the straight line; the flat plane; the square;*

> *the triangle; the circle! . . . These primary forms and figures were the secret of all effects . . . which were ever got into the architecture of the world.*

"Such passages give the impression of a receptive child responding to the fascination of abstract forms and patterns just at the moment when his thought-habits were becoming firm."[1]

Proposal

What is here proposed is a research into the possibilities of offering such experiences to many children at a very early age. This is a proposal to research the design for a setting that would provide for children the unusual advantage of developing in themselves a sympathy for basic forms, natural materials, and primary colors, to demonstrate a total environment for very young children, with indoor-outdoor living space enhancing their natural curiosity, exploratory needs, sensory perceptions, and creative-imaginative abilities.

Our banal, multi-storied, gadget-filled conventional buildings and stereotyped, lackluster playgrounds have robbed children of places to explore, to hide, to discover nature's secrets, to day-dream, to experience the world through all the senses, to allow imagination to run free in the world of

---

[1] *Denevi, D. "The education of a genius: analyzing major influences on the life of America's greatest architect." Young Children, vol. 23, pp. 233-40 (March 1968).*

the abstract, to create imaginative worlds. There is need to research what constitutes an appropriate, enriching and creative physical environment for the very earliest years. And this becomes particularly urgent in a day when more and more children, beginning in infancy and toddlerhood, are away from their own homes, cared for in a group setting every day. Such research must start with what psychologists, child developmentalists, and educators know about what children need in the matter of space and in the opportunity to use space for sensory stimulation, for mental health, and for cognitive as well as physical growth.

At the same time it is essential to demonstrate that this does not imply expensive, elaborate settings that are too costly for others to replicate. The project would explore innovative ways of providing an intriguing living space for infants and toddlers conducive to total development and growth. This is a relatively unresearched area at present. Much more research has been done on space and facilities for four- and five-year-olds and for school-age children. It may be said also that European researchers, builders, and designers have given more thought to the requirements of the very young child for space than have architects and child development specialists on this continent.

Members of the present Institute staff at UNC-G have been engaged in independent research related to this subject,

and a number of them have visited European nurseries. Contacts have been made with architects (e.g., H. H. Waechter and R. Martin Helick) who are fascinated by the challenge of translating into design how the child perceives, behaves, and learns while moving through space. The School of Design North Carolina State University, also is a resource for consultation in such a project.

The research possibilities in such a setting are well-nigh limitless: the initial designing of the facility itself, followed by observations of its use by children, subsequently by evaluation of their growth and learning in such an environment; and also testing by industry of new products and designs for very young children's living. More specifically:

> *. . . use of texture and surfaces, color and form, for appropriate sensory stimulation;*
>
> *. . . creation for a "family" of 30 children of a comfortable, home-like setting in contrast to a stultified, institutional one;*
>
> *. . . for crib babies, making the ceiling a source of stimulation with moving forms, reflections, color;*
>
> *. . . space that affords freedom with natural limits, seclusion and quiet, protection to explore the world of nature and to feel akin to it;*
>
> *. . . eliminating hazards in the use of water as a delightful sensory experience;*
>
> *. . . provision for experience with physical forces: inclines and ramps with balls, a water mill-wheel, balancing boards, wheels, stepping stones;*

> *. . . creative uses of blocks by children exposed to a rich variety of forms and natural materials*

The demonstration would begin with the creation of an imaginative, relatively inexpensive and sturdy play area for very young children, an area that would be inviting to and could safely be used by neighborhood children without the necessity for close supervision. Actively avoiding stereotype slide-and-swing sets and stark, traditional climbing apparatus, the project would innovate with:

> *. . . concrete sculpture for seating, climbing, sliding, water play, and general adventuring;*
>
> *. . . ramps, inclines, stepping stones, platform or dais, tumbling mats, digging pit;*
>
> *. . . slatted screens, baffles with peepholes, hollows for retreating from the general activity;*
>
> *. . . use of water as a sensory experience, eliminating hazards;*

All of this would be designed for the very youngest children of the community, a "Creative Tot Lot" that would be sought out by visitors and parents from all over the city, and indeed from over the nation, an area that when seen would invevitably arouse the comment, "Why can't we have this for our babies too?"

The research and design required would come within the full scope of the graduate program at the University of

North Carolina at Greensboro. Interested would be the Departments of Psychology, Sociology, Fine Arts, the School of Education and the School of Home Economics. The latter is involved in the study of child development as well as in research in textiles, lighting, interior design, etc.[2] The proposed new physical facilities would also be a resource for research activity on the part of industry.

A facility for the daytime care and living of about 30 infants and toddlers with six or so care-givers is seen as being constructed near an industry but convenient also to the homes or working sites of families whose babies would attend each day.

UNC-G's Supporting Project

The above proposed project would become an integral part of a research and demonstration project that has been in operation since 1966 in the Institute for Child Development, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The University's contribution to the present proposal would be to make available the personnel and facilities of its ongoing Demonstration Project: Group Care of Infants.[3] To date,

---

[2] The Institute for Child and Family Development, it should be noted, as the contracting agency cuts across departmental lines within the University, being an agency established to encourage inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary research in all the fields relating to children.

[3] See companion booklet containing proposals and progress reports, a full record of the Demonstration Project: Group Care of Infants.

$515,000. in grant funds from U.S. Children's Bureau (Child Welfare Research and Demonstration Grants Program) and $51,000. in University counterpart funds have supported this project. It has attracted visitors and inquiries from all over the nation. Its Visitor's Book is a WHO'S WHO in health, education and welfare in the United States.

There is no longer any doubt that demand for quality facilities for the care of infants and toddlers will burgeon in the next decade. Industry and business as well as churches and other voluntary agencies are on the threshold of new interest in and assumption of responsibility for programs of all-day care for very young children of employed women. The demand is already felt for imaginative, innovative facilities for this care, easily replicable at reasonable cost.

The UNC-G Infant/Toddler project has already demonstrated much that is useful in the matter of daily program for infants and of training for staff. The project is, however, limited in what it can demonstrate in relation to physical facilities--creative use of space both indoors and out and its relation to the young child's development. It is in this area that the presently proposed project would enhance the existing infant care project, at the same time the latter would offer the basic resources needed for actualizing the project, NURTURING CREATIVITY: THE ROLE OF LIVING SPACE IN THE FIRST YEARS OF LIFE.